

DELIUS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER NO. 15 - DECEMBER 1966.

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The newsletter, which it is hoped to devote mainly to the discussion of musical and aesthetic matters will, from this issue, appear separately from Secretary's Notes on past and forthcoming events of the Society, though where possible both bulletins will be circulated together. I should be very interested to hear whether members like this idea - any views you may have on the make-up of the newsletter would be most helpful. The Committee feels, as I do, that we should give the best service we can to those devoted members who cannot attend meetings, and any new departures in the newsletter are planned with this in mind.

Correction

I must apologise for a misquotation in the section headed "Eternal Recurrence" in the last newsletter. The final paragraph contained a superfluous 'not' which succeeded in making nonsense of the passage. This should read:-

"Existence is pain, and joy lies not in non-existence, as Schopenhauer would have it but it's tragic transfiguration.....From the darkest night of the soul rises Zarathustra's "Trunkenes Lied", his Dionysian song of the deep suffering of the world, which is yet surpassed in depth by that rapture of delight which wills, not that the world with its pain should pass away, but that it should last for ever; an eternity not of joy (as Nietzsche is so often misunderstood to mean) but of the world with all its sorrow, transfigured in the act of willing it".

2. This seems an appropriate time of the year to include some thoughts on:-

NEW BOTTLES FOR NEW WINE

Throughout his life Delius concerned himself with the problem of devising large-scale sonata structures that would be the logical outcome of his unique style. As this style developed it became obvious that the structures of the past would not suit his purpose and the path into the unknown was to prove long and difficult for him.

All the works bearing classical titles should be taken into consideration in following Delius on his painful journey - sonatas, concertos and quartets - and it will be seen that he did not allow himself the pleasure of a return to old pastures, as the neo-classicists did and as Schoenberg and his pupils were able to do, after the discovery of the dodecaphonic principle. When he is criticised for his lack of appreciation of his great predecessors, it should be remembered what it cost him to cut himself free from the bonds of tradition.

In this endeavour he had the example of Grieg, whose struggle with the sonata principle was equally protracted and bitter. It has become general practice to belittle Grieg; his music commits the unpardonable error, according to modern aesthetes, of being immediately attractive and clear. However, Delius respected Grieg as an artist and much of the early music bears witness to this. Grieg had to pay a heavy price for his originality, an originality that is not always evident from the study of the scores, but which made the sound of every bar he wrote unmistakeably his. This price was an unresolved struggle with larger forms (there is an unfinished opera, second piano concerto and second string quartet).

/ Debussy

Debussy, also, after the early string quartet (like Grieg's, in G minor and, one would think, to some extent modelled on the Grieg work) abandoned the sonata until, at the end of his life, his final manner unlocked the door to the sonata once more. Debussy expressed the nature of the problem with characteristic clarity:-

"For a single bar that I write that may be free and alive, there are twenty stifled by the weight of what is known as tradition, the influence of which I consider to be hypocritical and despicable. Observe, if you please, that I am little concerned about the fact that it may be my own tradition we are talking about".

Piano Concerto

Since the first quartets and first violin sonata remain unknown, the earliest work to be considered is the Piano Concerto, which was sketched, in its original three-movement form, during Delius's second stay in Florida in 1897. It is thus an early work and must be considered in this light. It is evident enough that Delius was far from happy with it, and after it had been given in public he re-wrote it, cutting out the finale altogether, and placing the Largo between the development and recapitulation of the original first movement. The result was a one-movement concerto and Delius, who was now at the height of his powers, had found the type of concerto structure he needed. The recasting of the piano concerto is therefore an event of great importance in Delius's development, in spite of the disparity between his early and later styles, from which it was not surprising that he still felt the piece to be unsatisfactory. Perhaps the reason can be found by looking at the other concertos. In all of them the solo instrument is seldom silent, posing the problem of finding a continuous arch of melody and significant figuration for the soloist, stretching from the first bar to the last. This the piano was not suited for and it must have been uncongenial for him to devise "effective" passages in which he could not wholeheartedly believe. In spite of this, there is much that is beautiful and original in the concerto, and it is surely in everybody's interest not to allow the piano the unrelieved prominence it has in the recording in which Lady Beecham is the soloist.

The Piano Concerto has had to weather very heavy criticism. However, if one is interested in a particular poet it is usual to buy the complete works and I cannot imagine anyone being furious because his book of Shelley contains a section for the juvenile poems. If you appreciate the poet, everything he wrote becomes interesting, a principle which has equal force in the appreciation of music.

Next in order of composition is the so-called 'first violin sonata' (really the second) and this, although started in 1905, was not completed until 1914. Seventeen years had passed since the sketch of the piano concerto and these dates illustrate forcibly the extent of the difficulties that Delius had to surmount in the creation of new forms. Once he had found what he wanted the three remaining concertos were written in quick succession and each is in the form of a single movement.

Double Concerto

The Double Concerto has also had many detractors. Sir Thomas Beecham says 'the composer (betrays) an obvious inability to handle the violincello part when it is not playing melodic passages' and suggests that it should be 'subjected... to fairly ruthless revision'. No doubt the cello part should be edited as it was in the 'cello concerto, but after hearing the new recording several times, I am unable to understand Sir Thomas's objections. In the standard repertory there are concertos and trios where the cello is at times given a hum-drum accompaniment to play, or some meaningless piece of baroque figuration, and these passages are accepted as being in the nature of the medium.

Certainly Edward Greenfield (The Gramophone: May 1966) found no grounds for objection. He calls the work "one of the most beautifully constructed one-movement concertos ever written" and describes how "each theme is shown to be related to the last clearly and carefully but without the sort of underlining that can make Lisztian or Franckian metamorphosis so tiresome". He sums up the concerto as being "plainly one of Delius's masterpieces" - a judgment that should not surprise us, since we know Delius to be a great composer, but which will undoubtedly surprise a great many people.

It must have surprised the other critics: Geoffrey Crankshaw (Records and Recording: May 1966) calls the piece a "curiously half-hearted affair" and says that "it is all too clear that the central, slow section is what really interests Delius, and the final fireworks are a contrived gesture." He calls the solo figurations "anything but organic" and observes that Delius was not "deeply in sympathy with the type of thought demanded by sonata forms". Of course he was not; sonata form - in the classical sense - was just precisely what Delius was trying to get away from, and beautiful as the slow movement is, I do not find the remainder to be at a lower level of inspiration - indeed, to me the concerto is consistently eloquent throughout.

Burnett James remarks, sensibly, (Record Review: May 1966) "It uses few of the classical devices for a double concerto; but then it never meant to. Certainly the writing for the soloists is not invariably 'effective' and sometimes the cello does seem to have to work unnaturally hard to 'sound'. But there remains a good deal of lovely music..."

A music critic of the Daily Telegraph found the concerto 'monotonous' and had little good to say about the piece. All the other critics found the performance sensitive, eloquent and committed, as indeed it is. It is with the deepest pleasure that we express our indebtedness to our member, Mr. Warburg, the soloist with Raymond Cohen, and the moving spirit behind the performance.

A review of the record will appear in the next newsletter, Mr. Lyndon Jenkins having agreed to act as our gramophone critic, and I leave further comment to him.

Violin Concerto

In reviewing the Double Concerto, Edward Greenfield had much to say about its construction being "a sort of living form of Hans Keller-type functional analysis". Members will probably be aware that the Violin Concerto has been subjected to this type of examination by Deryck Cooke (Musical Times: July 1962) and its masterly construction vindicated.

From Deryck Cooke's analysis it is apparent that however rhapsodic the composition may sound, every part of it (including every detail of the solo part) is essential to the overall design. The nature of this design has however changed. In the Double Concerto the smaller "sections" and themes are clearly defined, whereas in the Violin Concerto there is a constant interplay and transformation of motives, so that the music seems to grow naturally from one bar to the next.

Delius draws the listener's attention to the main divisions however. In each Concerto the slow movement is ushered in by a vigorous climax followed by a slackening of the pulse and diminuendo. In both also the slow movement is followed by a lightly scored *cadenza*. The *cadenza* of the Violon Concerto completely surpasses that of its sister work and is - for me at least - the high spot of the composition. How wonderfully, over almost motionless harmonies, does the violin soar and hover, as though it were indeed the embodiment in sound of a bird's flight, or the song of an even more ecstatic lark than Vaughan Williams mirrors in his 'Lark Ascending'.

The return to the opening themes shows a similar increase in subtlety; in the Double Concerto a gradual crescendo in the whole orchestra; in the Violin Concerto only a single bar for flutes in thirds over a tympany roll and a high trill for the soloist, and yet the effect is masterly. Whereas the Double Concerto draws its concluding pages from a motive in the slow movement, the Violin Concerto incorporates an entirely new Allegretto section before reaching an equally serene close. It must be accepted that such music will not conform to preconceived notions as to what it should do. We should remember that when Strauss, in the development section of 'Don Juan', announces an entirely new and magnificent theme, it is a stroke of genius, not an irrelevance.

Cello Concerto

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past....."

The last few years have seen the emergence of the later Delius works from the limbo to which they had been relegated, and in general the criticisms have been favourable, even enthusiastic. As is usual with Delius, the beauty and eloquence of the music is such that one is not at first aware of the subtle and careful construction. This, of course, is as it should be.

The Cello Concerto is quite as individual as the others and matches in character its solo instrument. Elgar's Cello Concerto is a valedictory work and so is Delius's; it is natural to think of them together. Delius allows his themes greater breadth than in the two preceding Concertos and it is easy to understand his satisfaction with the melodic inspiration in this composition. Together with this, however, is his subtle use of thematic transformations so that a descending arpeggio and rising second in the opening bars re-appears in changing shapes throughout the work.

The tempo is moderate, and the climax before the slow movement is melodic, not dramatic, so that the slow movement continues the tone of quiet rumination set from the opening measures. The return of the main theme of the opening still does not break the spell and there is no cadenza, merely a quiet trill on the solo instrument to conclude the section.

Without allowing the tempo to slacken, Delius goes straight into the Allegro moderato - the superb tune in D major - and there is no quotation from previous movements in this final part of the work. It must be said that beautiful as the recorded performance is, the music of this section is not played at the speed required by the composer, and an impression of lack of contrast and formal balance results. Nevertheless this Concerto is as beautifully constructed as its predecessors.

Delius adopts a fresh approach with each of his Concertos and his remaining works with classical titles have just as much variety and originality. I do not propose to more than mention the second and third violin sonatas, cello sonata and string quartet (some of these have several contrasted movements), but I hope to discuss them in greater detail in a future newsletter. All these works have their treasures, and I would not willingly part with any.

3.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE - II

For the benefit of new members, I should explain that a questionnaire was circulated with our February newsletter, and I commented under the heading Part I on members' replies to the first seven questions in our May newsletter. I now turn to the eighth question -

Do you feel that the newsletter, and the Society, should confine itself solely to the music of Delius? This is not to suggest that we should become an English music society, but is it your wish that we should never discuss other composers in the newsletter, or include their works in our recitals?

Thirteen members answered 'yes'; forty-two said 'no' and six replies were uncertain. I propose to quote from each category, every member's view being of importance to the Society.

A. Yes. Six replies were unconditional, but the remainder suggested that other composers could be mentioned for purposes of comparison or where the context demanded it. Care would be needed to prevent the possibility of Delius being submerged (should there be any sign of this, a smart letter to the Committee would be appreciated!) One member suggested that "reference to similar societies, i.e. John Ireland, Arnold Bax, all fighting a similar cause, is surely acceptable". Members will recall that we have distributed leaflets of other societies' recitals from time to time. I should welcome other members' views on the question of co-operating with other societies but it is a matter which the Committee has constantly under consideration.

B. No. Twenty-three were unconditional 'no's'. Of those who commented on the question one member said "Delius didn't live or compose in a vacuum (though one sometimes gets the impression he would have preferred to!) and to avoid mention of other composers would I think encourage the "glass case" attitude which our Society is anxious to avoid".

Many members answered on the lines of the next quotation: "I think certain contemporaries of Delius - e.g. Bax, Ireland and a slightly later figure like E. J. Moeran should have works in performance alongside those of Delius. Also the music of his friends - Balfour Gardiner, Percy Grainger, Cyril Scott, Norman O'Neil, Roger Quilter, and of course Philip Heseltine-Peter Warlock. F.D. influenced them all!"

There were also several suggestions such as the next:- "I believe that the unique characteristics and special beauties of Delius' music are enhanced by hearing items of the music in programmes including items by other composers. The Committee might like to consider the possibilities of joint meetings with other Societies, the John Ireland Society for example".

This idea is developed by another member: "I feel that the newsletter and the Society should most certainly not confine itself to the works of Delius but should discuss and play the music of other composers, British, Continental and American, if in any way even remotely connected with Delius".

There are supporters, however, for a somewhat contrary view: "I am very strongly against the English Music Society in the context of Delius as much of his claim to attention lies in the fact that his genius was of a different order, and superior, to that of almost any other British composer. He was an international composer; not, like most of the others, a British one only".

Finally: "There is a good case for sticking to Delius and exploring his work in depth - for instance, I would like to go through the operas. Perhaps the Society might consider working over alternate two-year cycles, the first of which would be on Delius, taking a major grouping of the works over the full period, then in the second turning to English music of the Delius period, still with some emphasis on him and performances of his work, but with some research and discussion on other composers. However Delius is endlessly fascinating, while much of the music of his contemporaries is not. This would limit the amount of attention we could give to them".

In essence there seems to be a large measure of agreement between members. Our primary concern must be for Delius (other Societies have been created to serve other needs) but a complete portrait demands that some attention should be given to background detail. We need not fear that this will diminish the importance of the subject - rather will it set him in relief and his true stature will be all the more apparent.

4.

NEW MEMBERS

We last issued a list of new members with our May newsletter, and we welcome the following members who have joined since then. This takes us up to the end of September only, and a further list will be issued later.

Brian K. Douglas, Esq., 20, Elm Road, Didsbury, Manchester, 20.	From our advertisement in The Gramophone.
Gilbert A. Hansen, Esq., 600 W. Shiawassee Street, Lansing, Michigan 48933, U. S. A.	From our advertisement in The Gramophone
Michael Pyne, Esq., 80, Sinclair Road, London, W. 14.	Through our advert. in The Gramophone (first enquiry September 1965).
A. J. Sanders, Esq., 29, Church Walk, Thames Ditton, Surrey.	From our advertisement in The Gramophone
D. N. I. Rust, Esq., Whitewood, 69a Pope's Avenue, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, Middx.	Through our advert. in The Gramophone (first enquiry January 1965).
P. Suffolk, Esq., 56, Manor Abbey Road, Halesowen, Birmingham.	Probably introduced to the Society by our member, Mr. Robert Wright.
Prof. and Mrs. Michael W. Alssid, 56, Griggs Road, Brookline, Massachusetts 02146, U. S. A.	Through our advertisement in The Gramophone
Peter Ashworth, Esq., 39a, Park Hill Road, Croydon, Surrey.	From our advertisement in the programme for the Prom performance of the Mass of Life.
Kenneth Ward, Esq., Cockfields, Cock Green, Felsted, Dunmow, Essex.	From our advertisement in The Gramophone.
Peter Longhurst, Esq., Arlaw Banks, Haste Hill, Haslemere, Surrey.	Introduced to the Society by Mr. Rodney Meadows of our Committee.
Brian Bond, Esq., Olmeda, Ferry Lane, Medmenham, Marlow, Bucks.	Introduced to the Society by our member, Mr. David Tall.
C. R. O. Jones, Esq., Flat 4, 23 Lisle Street, London, W. C. 2.	From our advertisement in the programme for the Prom performance of the Mass of Life.
Miss K. M. Bruce, 49, Eton Avenue, New Maldon, Surrey.	From our advertisement in the programme for the Prom performance of the Mass of Life
John W. Hodgson, Esq., 60, Fairacres, off Evelyn Avenue, Ruislip, Middlesex.	From our advertisement in the programme for the Prom performance of the Mass of Life
Christopher Redwood, Esq., 24, Saxon Road, London, E. 3.	Introduced to the Society by Mr. Aprahamian.

5. THE SEASON'S GREETINGS, AND LOOKING FORWARD TO OUR NEXT MEETING AT HOLBORN LIBRARY, (32 THEOBALDS ROAD, LONDON, W. C. 1.) ON FRIDAY, 6TH JANUARY, 1967, AT 7 FOR 7.30 P.M.

John White
(EDITOR)